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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION - VISIT OF KUWAIT FM TO TEHRAN

Ref: Kuwait 81

11. (SBU) Summary: Kuwaiti media coverage of Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah's January 16, 2008, press conference in Tehran focused almost exclusively on issues discussed and, in all but two English-language newspapers, did not contain any reference to the FM's comment on Kuwaiti-Iranian "friendship" as reported by other wire services; nor was any direct reference made to President Bush's January 11-12 visit to Kuwait. Reports in all the Arabic-language dailies were taken exclusively from the report of the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) datelined Tehran, January 16, which noted that the issues discussed included the continental shelf, gas and water transportation, and plans for a visit by the Amir to Iran. However, the English-language dailies Kuwait Times and Arab Times ran Agence France Presse and other wire reports that the Kuwait FM had called Iran a "friend" only days after President Bush in Kuwait labeled Iran a major sponsor of terror. To date, there has been only one commentary on the FM's visit to Teheran. The intensity of coverage of the FM's trip paled in comparison to the week-long multi-page coverage of President Bush's visit to Kuwait, which was overwhelmingly positive. On January 21, MFA U/S Al-Jarallah clarified to CDA that the United States is Kuwait's "friend," and that the press had likely distorted the remarks of the FM. End summary.

12. (U) News reports in the Arabic-language local press on the official two-day visit of the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah, to Iran were taken exclusively from the Kuwait News Agency's (KUNA) report of January 16, 2008. Most carried a front-page story with a photo and one-eighth-page of text. Some ran it as the lead story, but others did not. This minimal reporting contrasted sharply with the volumes of coverage that President Bush received before, during, and after his January 11-12 visit to Kuwait.

13. (U) The KUNA report on the FM's visit and press conference quoted him as saying, "Both sides discussed bilateral relations and files that needed to be finalized, particularly the continental shelf, the transportation of Iranian gas and water to Kuwait to pave way for the visit of His Highness the Amir to Iran." The only comment by the Kuwait FM about the nature of the Kuwaiti-Iranian relations was: "We in the State of Kuwait are always supporting any dialogue leading to the strengthening of security and stability in the region."

14. (U) Kuwait's two major English-language dailies, however, ran AFP wire reports that highlighted a comment attributed to the FM that Iran is Kuwait's "friend." For example, the Kuwait Times front-page, but not lead, story was headlined "Kuwait: Iran Is Our

Friend." It noted that the FM affirmed Kuwaiti-Iranian ties "despite U.S. worries." It quoted FM Shaykh Mohammed Al-Sabah as saying, "My country knows who is our friend and who is our enemy and Iran is our friend."

¶15. (U) To date, there has been only one editorial in the Kuwaiti press that made comparisons between the FM's visit to Tehran and President Bush's visit to Kuwait. In a commentary printed in the January 17, 2008 issue of the Arabic-language Al-Nahar, Seham Al-Fraih wrote positively of her participation in a January 12 roundtable with the President and Kuwaiti women activists. She closed with a reference to the January 16 TIME Magazine article by Scott MacLeod saying, "The meeting with the President was special and different from previous ones. However, reading what was written in TIME magazine by Scott McLeod is important too."

¶16. (SBU) Comment: The fact that none of the Arabic-language newspapers printed other wire agencies' reports about the FM's statements in Iran may reflect the desire of the GOK, through KUNA, to de-emphasize the Foreign Minister's supposed reference to Iran as a "friend." Also, on January 21, CDA brought to the attention of Kuwait MFA U/S Khaled Al-Jarallah the potential negative fall-out from the remarks attributed to the FM. Jarallah said emphatically that the United States is Kuwait's "friend," that the FM is well aware of sensitivities in dealing with Iran, and that it is likely that his remarks were distorted by the press. He also cast doubt that the FM uttered the quote in para 4, but clarified that, in terms of delivering messages from the USG to Iran and vice versa, the FM told the press that Kuwait serves as nobody's postman. End comment.

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